

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 001239

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR OES DSINGER AND RDALEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA READY ON PAPER TO COUNTER AVIAN
INFLUENZA THREAT

REF: SECSTATE 209622

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The GOL has plans in place to manage a possible outbreak of avian influenza or human pandemic influenza. An outbreak of extremely virulent human pandemic influenza would undoubtedly strain Lithuania's capabilities, but the GOL likely would report its situation truthfully and seek assistance from both its allies and international organizations. Lithuania has the technical means to detect any outbreak rapidly, and we expect that it would use both police and the military to effectively enforce a quarantine if the situation required.

PREPAREDNESS/COMMUNICATION

2. (SBU) The GOL's Ministry of Health (MOH) has an "Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan," and the State Food and Veterinary Service (SFVS) has an "Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease Contingency Plan." Localities and other ministries also have plans, but the MOH and SFVS plans are the most important. We will send a copy of these plans via e-mail to the POCs listed in reftel. We have no reason to doubt that the GOL will implement these plans if avian or pandemic influenza occurs in Lithuania. An outbreak would likely strain Lithuania's resources and the GOL likely would seek support from the EU and possibly from the USG.

3. (SBU) We expect that the GOL would report truthfully the scope of any disease outbreak among people or animals. The GOL has promised to compensate farmers for losses if their flocks need to be culled, and we expect that farmers will be cooperative if an outbreak occurs in Lithuania.

4. (SBU) Preparing for avian or pandemic human influenza is a high priority for the MOH and the State Food and Veterinary Service, but it is not among the GOL's most pressing issues at present. Foreign Minister Valionis, Prime Minister Brazauskas, or President Adamkus would be able to raise the profile of this issue in Lithuania, but we would recommend working with Lithuania's capable Health Minister, Zilvinas Padaiga, first.

5. (SBU) The Director of the SFVS told us that he is working closely with EU officials and that the GOL has implemented all detection, containment, and reporting guidelines recommended by the EU.

6. (SBU) The MOH's "Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan" spells out the GOL's intention to cooperate with both the EU and WHO. We would not expect the GOL to ask for assistance unless there would be an outbreak in Lithuania large enough to strain local resources or if there were an outbreak elsewhere that demonstrated clearly that the influenza was poised to become a major world catastrophe. The GOL would likely turn first to the EU, but GOL leaders would also welcome approaches from the USG in either a bilateral or multilateral setting.

7. (SBU) Annual flu shot are available in Lithuania, and an increasing number of Lithuanians get them, presumably in response to the MOH's public encouragements. Many Lithuanians, however, still do not routinely get flu shots. Lithuania produces no flu vaccine and is not developing an H5N1 vaccine. In general, foreign makers or donors of vaccines would not enjoy a liability shield. The Director General of the MOH's Drug Control Agency told us, however, that this is a very complicated issue and is difficult to address as a hypothetical situation. He offered to make his agency's lawyers available to us if we wanted to ask more detailed questions on liability.

8. (SBU) The GOL health and veterinary establishment is very well informed about avian influenza. Among the general public, however, awareness is quite low. The GOL is taking steps to raise awareness among farmers, particularly poultry farmers. The MOH updates every two weeks its strategic plan for distributing information about avian influenza. As outlined in this plan, the MOH uses mass media, public conferences, and networks of healthcare professionals to raise public awareness of avian influenza.

SURVEILLANCE/DETECTION

19. (SBU) The medical and agricultural sectors are capable of rapidly diagnosing a new strain of influenza among people or animals. The SFVS told us that if it positively diagnosed a new strain of influenza, it would send the sample to an EU reference laboratory in the UK for a final diagnosis. Lithuania does not have the capability to subtype viruses.

110. (SBU) Lithuania still has not acquired an adequate supply of Tamiflu (see para 11). In addition, the GOL may be unable to communicate quickly with outlying regions in the event of a rapidly occurring outbreak. Many residents of these rural regions tend to be poor, and may not have televisions or radios, the media of choice for communicating the GOL's messages.

RESPONSE/CONTAINMENT

111. (SBU) Lithuania has a stockpile of most medicines, but it does not yet have Tamiflu. The MOH's Health Emergency Situation Center (HECS) told us that it ordered enough Tamiflu to service 30 percent of Lithuania's population of 3.4 million and that it expects these drugs to arrive by "early next year."

112. (SBU) HECS told us that Lithuania has a stockpile of prepositioned personal protective gear.

113. (SBU) Lithuania has the capability to respond rapidly to either human or animal outbreaks. The SFVS action plan contains the guidelines for culling/vaccination of birds, disinfection of facilities, and limitations on animal movement.

114. (SBU) The GOL has in the past quarantined hospitals where outbreaks of infectious diseases occurred, but it has never had to deal with an epidemiological situation as complicated as pandemic influenza would be. The SFVS action plan, consistent with EU requirements, calls for establishing a "protection zone" within a radius of 3 km of an outbreak. The GOL, using both the police and the military, would restrict or prohibit the movement of people, transport, and animals to and from this zone. Although the GOL has never had to employ these kinds of resources in response to a health crisis, it has used both the police and military successfully to restrict movements to and from areas hit by flooding. In a crisis situation, the GOL's Civil Defense Agency would take the lead role in coordinating all of the agencies involved.

COMMENT

115. (SBU) Lithuania has taken many reasonable steps to mitigate the threat posed by avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic. While the issue does not yet raise tremendous concern among the general public, the GOL takes the threat seriously and is responding accordingly.

KELLY